

Message Text

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PAGE 01 JIDDA 05786 231222Z

44

ACTION NEA-10

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC 5675

INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN

AMEMBASSY CAIRO

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C O N F I D E N T I A L JIDDA 5786

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: SCUL, MPOL, SA, US

SUBJECT: THE MARCHING BAND

1. SOME WEEKS AGO, IN A BURST OF BICENTENNIAL BENEVOLENCE, WE INFORMED THE FOREIGN OFFICE THAT WE WOULD LIKE TO OFFER OUR SAUDI FRIENDS THE CHEERFUL SERVICES OF THE USAREUR MARCHING BAND AND DRILL TEAM.

2. IT IS A CURIOUS TRAIT OF ARABISTS THAT THEY ALL ACQUIRE CONFIDENCE IN THEIR ABILITY TO PERCEIVE THE THINGS ARABS LIKE OR LOOK AT ASKANCE. THIS IS TRUE BF THE TWO-DAY WONDERS WHO VISIT THE ARAB WORLD OR THE FORTY-YEAR FOSSILS IN THE FIELD. SOMETIMES, THE FOSSILS ARE AS WRONG AS THE FLEDGLINGS. AS THE CASE OF THE MARCHING BAND WILL ILLUSTRATE.

3. WHEN I OFFERED THE BAND'S SERVICES TO THE SAUDIS, I FELT AN INNER WARMTH, THOUGH I HAVE TO ADMIT THE CLIMATE IN THIS PLACE MIGHT HAVE CAUSED IT. I GAVE IT NO MORE THOUGHT UNTIL SOME DAYS LATER WHEN I WAS SEATED WITH HIS EXCELLENCY HIS ROYAL HIGHNESS PRINCE SAUD AL-FAISAL DISCUSSING SUBJECTS SO WEIGHTY I CAN'T REMEMBER WHAT THEY WERE. SUDDENLY THE PRINCE LOST HIS GENIAL AIR AND ASKED ABRUPTLY, "WHAT IS THIS BAND YOU WANT TO BRING HERE?" HIS DEMEANOR WAS RESERVED, PERPLEXED; AND FOR A MOMENT I THOUGHT I STOOD ACCUSED OF TERRORISM. I
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PAGE 02 JIDDA 05786 231222Z

SAID, "WHAT BAND?" SAUD REPLIED, "IT MARCHES AROUND." I

REMEMBERED THE MARCHING BAND AND SAID, "WE OFFERED TO HAVE IT VISIT YOUR COUNTRY FOR WHATEVER USE YOU MAY HAVE FOR A BAND." "WE DO NOT WANT IT," SAID HRH, ADDING, "IT WOULD MARCH HERE, THERE AND EVERYWHERE. IT WILL EXCITE THE PEOPLE. WE DO NOT HAVE MARTIAL DISPLAYS HERE." "THAT'S OF COURSE ENTIRELY UP TO YOU," I SAID, "WE SIMPLY MADE A GESTURE. IF YOU CAN'T USE IT, THERE'S NO PROBLEM AT ALL." SAUD OF PRINCETON, FEARING I MIGHT BE OFFENDED, SAID PLACATINGLY, "WE HAVEN'T PERMITTED PUBLIC DISPLAYS OF THAT KIND SINCE 1965. THEY EXCITE THE PEOPLE. IT CAN MARCH AROUND YOUR COMPOUND BUT NOT OUTSIDE." I SAID THAT WOULDN'T BE PRACTICAL. SO MUCH FOR MY PERCEPTION OF WHAT MIGHT AMUSE THIS WAHHABI SOCIETY.

4. WELL, IT IS NOT UNHEARD OF THAT ITEMS THE SAUDIS CONSIDER UNSUITABLE FOR PUBLIC DISPLAY LIKE BANDS, BOOZE AND BROADS, FIND A WARMER WELCOME IN JORDAN, AND THUS IT WAS WITH OUR MARCHING BAND. IT REPORTEDLY HAD SUCH A FINE EFFECT THERE THAT HM HUSSEIN FEELS HE SIMPLY MUST HAVE ONE JUST LIKE OURS FOR HIS VERY OWN. HIS DEEP DESIRE, ONE UNDERSTANDS, TOOK HIM DOWN THE STRAIGHT, BROAD ROAD OF U.S. MILITARY ASSISTANCE: HE REQUESTED A FOUR-MAN TEAM TO CREATE AND TRAIN A MARCHING BAND FOR HIM, AND WE ARE RESPONDING HELPLESSLY (OR HELPFULLY, DEPENDING ON HOW YOU LOOK AT IT). OF COURSE IT IS A VITAL NEED AND HE WOULD GO TO THE SOVIETS IF WE DON'T DO IT.

5. AS TRUE EXPERTS IN SUCH MATTERS, THE JORDANIANS KNOW THE FOUR-MAN TEAM CAN BE RELIED ON TO STIMULATE A BURING REQUIREMENT FOR MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS, FOUR SETS OF UNIFORMS, BATONS, BINOCULARS AND COMPASSES (IN CASE THE BAND GETS LOST), TRUCKS AND SPARES, TAPE RECORDERS, PUBLIC ADDRESS SYSTEMS, A DANCE COMBO AND, BEST OF ALL, THE NEED FOR ANOTHER VISIT TO SAUDI ARABIA BY HIS JORDANIAN MAJESTY FOR YOU KNOW WHAT.

6. I HOPE I WILL NOT BE INSTRUCTED TO SUPPORT THIS NOBLE PROJECT. I WOULD OF COURSE LIKE TO SEE PRINCE SAUD'S FACE WHEN HE LEARNS THAT THE MARCHING BAND HE COULDN'T USE WAS SO GOOD IT BROUGHT HIS AUGUST UNCLES THE DILUTED PLEASURE OF ANOTHER VISIT BY THE JORDAN KING -- TOGETHER WITH THE PRIVILEGE OF SHELLING OUT WHATEVER SUM IS NECESSARY TO PAY FOR IT. (I'M ASSUMING WE WON'T PAY.)
CONFIDENTIAL

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PAGE 03 JIDDA 05786 231222Z

7. WHICH REMINDS ME OF THAT GREAT OLD AMERICAN TUNE "HOT DOG* THAT'S WHERE HIS MONEY GOES*" WOULDN'T THAT BE A FINE THEME SONG FOR THE JORDAN MARCHING BAND? (REFRAIN ON REQUEST WITH STAMPED SELF-ADDRESSED ENVELOPE.)
PORTER

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NNN

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